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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 001523

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DEPARTMENT FOR ISN/CTR, EUR/RUS AND EUR/PRA

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TAGS: [GG](#) [KNNP](#) [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [RS](#) [TSPL](#)

SUBJECT: RUSSIA: NEW CONCILIATORY TONE AT ISTC MEETINGS

REF: A. MOSCOW 1493

[1](#)B. MOSCOW 12858

Classified By: EST Counselor Daniel O'Grady. Reasons: 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The March 29-30 meetings in Moscow of the Coordinating Committee and Governing Board of the International Science and Technology Center (ISTC) succeeded in resolving some of the controversial issues facing the center, while defusing others to allow for their resolution down the road. Agreements were reached on how to label areas of weapons expertise for project participants, on allowing a reduction in the Russian labor force employed at the ISTC, and on implementing improvements in the Center's procurement procedures. On the other hand, varied perspectives on the Vision Statement and Strategic Plan to govern the Center's future indicated that an effort to reach agreement was premature. The parties decided to form a working group to see if a common draft could be produced in time for the next Governing Board meeting at the end of June. Problems in gaining access to do audits and monitor projects also were deferred, with the parties entrusting the Executive Director to try to achieve a compromise solution. Finally, the issue of Georgia's dual membership in both the ISTC and the Science and Technology Center in Ukraine (STCU) -- raised only by Russia -- was also given to the Executive Director to study in the context of increasing cooperation between the two centers over the next eight months. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The March 29-30 Governing Board meeting exhibited almost none of the rancor evident at recent ISTC gatherings. All parties, but especially the Russian side, seemed to take pains to achieve harmonious solutions and not to hold up the Center's operations pending resolution of some of the thornier issues. The only agenda item producing moments of sharp repartee was the issue of weapons expertise areas to be used to characterize scientists and projects. On other potentially contentious issues, all sides were amenable to working out compromise language in small group meetings that took place before plenary sessions or outside the room during them. The result, by and large, was the presentation of draft language for the decision sheet that found speedy assent at the plenary before there was any great debate.

13. (C) Vision Statement and Strategic Plan: It quickly became apparent that other parties had not had sufficient time to fully digest the extensive comments and alternative language provided by the US to the Secretariat's draft. The Russians stated that they also had extensive comments that they had not yet presented. The EU said that it had some fundamental concerns over the detailed implementation specified in the draft. The EU wanted a document that was more vision and less planning. After some debate over the merits of including concrete implementation steps in the document, in which the EU seemed isolated in its position, all parties agreed that a working group should take over to try to reconcile the contending positions. The Russians professed to be alarmed that some of the comments by other parties would take the ISTC away from its original purpose and insisted that the tasking to the working group include an admonition not to stray from the ISTC founding agreement. This was recast in a more positive sense in a US-brokered deal to say that the working group should produce a document "consistent with" the founding agreement. The working group will make at least an interim report at the next Governing Board Meeting at the end of June.

14. (SBU) Access to Institutes: The Russian party asked for improved coordination of institute visits, noting the high volume of visits at Obelensk and Vector in particular. The Russians suggested an increase in the advance notification period and recommended that parties provide a list of individuals who might be visiting over the course of a year as a means of speeding the approval process. Canada and the EU indicated that they could provide such a list; the U.S. party said that it would be difficult to do. The question

MOSCOW 00001523 002 OF 003

raised by several parties was whether provision of such a list would actually speed approval of visits and, if so, why it was necessary to increase the advance notification time. The rights of the funding parties to audit and monitor projects were reaffirmed. In the absence of any clear route to consensus, the parties asked the Secretariat to review the issue and provide a report.

15. (SBU) Weapons Expertise Areas: Although the Russian party had seemed to agree on language characterizing scientists as "biological weapons experts" at working-level ISTC meetings over the past months, the Russian side immediately objected to such language at the executive session of the Governing Board. Approval of the Project Proposal Package that asks project participants to self-identify by area of expertise was threatened by the dispute, which featured Canada and Russia trading barbs about which country might have engaged in biological weapons production in the past. A compromise text was hammered out at the table that would allow the Russians to continue their official denial that they ever had worked on biological weapons, but also allowed them to concede that some of their scientists had such expertise. The new text asks participants to identify their "weapon or dual use technology expertise" as "missile, chemical, biological, nuclear, or other." This language also effectively expands the number of scientists who can engage on ISTC projects.

16. (C) Georgian Dual-Membership: Donor parties feared the worst when the Russians refused to discuss Georgia's dual membership in the ISTC and STCU at a pre-meeting on March 29 specifically called to address this issue. However, at a second pre-meeting on the 30th, the Russians sought to allay fears. MFA rep Krutskikh, saying he had received explicit instructions from Deputy Foreign Minister Kislyak, averred that the Russians did not want to punish Georgia in any way and did not want the issue cast in terms of Georgia. It was a question of administrative efficiency and principle. The Russians said they had been approached by other members of the STCU about joining the ISTC as well and they did not want other countries coming in. They also said that they were not interested in merging the two centers. The Western parties

remained unconvinced that it was necessary to have any statement about dual membership, but the Russians said one was needed from their perspective.

¶17. (C) In order not to delay the opening of the Governing Board session, a small group stayed behind to try to reach compromise language on the issue. After almost two hours of haggling, agreement was reached on a paragraph for the decision sheet that would ask the Executive Director to consult with all parties on the issue of improving administrative efficiency, including in terms of "membership," in the context of studying increased cooperation between the ISTC and STCU. The Russians fought for mention of "dual-membership" in this context, but bowed to Western resistance. The Russians had to be content with mention of dual membership in the agenda item title, which the West conceded could not be changed because it previously had been agreed. At one point, the Russian rep seemed to indicate that after study of the issue for six months if the conclusion was that Georgia could remain a member of both centers, then that would be acceptable to the Russians. When asked to confirm this, the Russian rep retreated, saying that Moscow would have to consider its position again at that time. The Executive Director is scheduled to report his findings at the November 2007 Governing Board meeting.

¶18. (U) Staff Reductions: After raising issues with how the ISTC would select employees to be released at a pre-meeting on the 29th, the Russians did not raise objections to the Executive Director's new staffing plan that included the elimination of 18 positions.

¶19. (U) After a presentation by the firm assessing the ISTC's procurement procedures, all parties expressed relief that no

MOSCOW 00001523 003 OF 003

serious wrong-doing had been found. Parties quickly agreed to a US recommendation that the Executive Director make a determination of how to implement "best practices" outlined in the report that are not currently being followed at the Center. The Board also welcomed the future accession of Switzerland to the ISTC and approved the new Russian Deputy Executive Director, Sergey Vorobyov. The Board agreed that the next Governing Board meeting will be held on 29 June in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

¶10. (C) COMMENT: Georgian dual membership was obviously the dog that did not bark at the ISTC meeting. Kruitiskikh clearly had to have something in the decision sheet (perhaps for no other reason than that the prominence Russia had given to the issue meant it had to be addressed), but his willingness to back off in the face of Western opposition to any language directly or indirectly critical of Georgia contrasted with Russian behavior at the previous Governing Board meeting. It remains to be seen how the Russians will react in eight months to a Western position that promises to remain fundamentally unchanged. No other party gave any indication of weakening its support for Georgia. On other agenda items, the Russian position was similarly conciliatory even where there were clear differences in point of view from the Western parties (e.g., on the Vision Statement). It may be that the US bilateral with Kruitiskikh on March 29 (REF A) softened the Russian approach; they clearly appreciated working in a small group with the US to achieve compromise positions rather than dueling over language at the plenary.

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